



Veterans'

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

S P R I N G • 2 0 0 1

How Are We Doing?

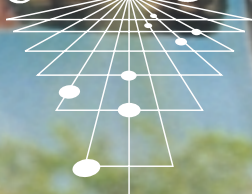
Our New Survey System
Seeks Your Feedback

10 Ways To Defy
Arthritis Pain

On Your Side

Patient Advocates
Work For You

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



Tuning Into Your Needs



Your Letters

Let's face it: Most of us would be happier to stay out of hospitals and examining rooms. After all, undergoing a surgical procedure or even just a routine checkup can be a little, well, uncomfortable. The last thing a person needs during a medical visit is a frustrating meeting with a staff member, complicated paper work or other unpleasantness.

To ensure your VA healthcare visits are positive, we have decided to reach out for your help. We'd like you to rate our performance each time you receive VA healthcare. Your feedback will help us understand where we stand in terms of service and how we can improve. See the next page for more about Quik Card, our survey system.

We also are urging you to seek out the assistance of patient advocates, specially trained personnel who can help you figure out how to fill out a form, file a grievance and otherwise act as your liaison with the VA healthcare system. To learn more about how a patient advocate can help you, see the article on page 6.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for the great response to the survey card found in the last issue of *Veterans' Health*. Your answers helped shape the content of this very edition. The arthritis article on page 4 addresses a health concern affecting many of you. We hope you find the article informative and ask you to turn to your VA healthcare provider if you have more questions about arthritis.

Enjoy a warm, safe spring.

—Laura Miller
Network Director

My father was a veteran and World War II POW. He recently passed away at the Cleveland VA Medical Center. Over the last five months, I've learned a lot about the VA and the way veterans are treated.

The *Plain Dealer's* articles on the VA were very negative. In defense, may I say: My dad never waited more than two weeks for any appointment, even CAT scans and a stress test.

Every morning and evening, senior doctors took the time to talk to us and answer all of our questions. My dad's room was clean, he was clean and the nurses treated him like family. The intensive care unit is run as well as any in this city. The doctors and staff were professional, thorough and compassionate.

I'd like to thank the VA, Cleveland and Brecksville. My dad was always treated with dignity and kindness right to the end.

There are two sides to every story. I am grateful to the VA for the care they showed my wonderful father and my family.

Dianne E. Palmer
Garfield Heights, Ohio

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: ROB LEWINE/THE STOCK MARKET

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How Are We Doing?

VA's Quik Card survey system seeks fast feedback. The goal: to serve you better.

Next time you receive VA healthcare—whether at a VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic—take a few moments to tell us about your visit. You can do that by filling out a Quik Card, a short survey that lets us know how your visit went and what we can do to improve the next one.

Look for Quik Cards in special display cases after your appointment. If you can't find one, be sure to ask a VA staff member for assistance. The questionnaire will ask you to rate features such as the staff's courtesy, the timeliness of the service, your confidence in the healthcare provider, the facility's cleanliness and more. We'll ask you what we did well and what we could do better. And we'll also invite you to identify VA staff members who were especially helpful.

What happens to your completed Quik Cards? Special VA teams review the responses and report findings to managers. They, in turn, make sure proper action is taken, whether it be complimenting a staff member or getting to the bottom of unnecessary delays.

What's more, we welcome you to check our progress. We'll post feedback from our Quik Card surveys, including improvements we've made as a result, in easy-to-spot locations throughout VISN 10 healthcare facilities. That way you'll see firsthand how much we value your opinion. **VA**

The image shows four overlapping 'How Are We Doing?' Quik Card survey forms. The forms are color-coded: Pharmacy (orange), Mental Health Care (light green), Primary Care (yellow), and Medical/Surgical Care (light blue). Each form includes a 'QUICK CARD' logo, a title, and a series of questions and rating scales. The Medical/Surgical Care form is the most visible and includes the following questions and scales:

- Name/Phone (Optional): _____
- Date: _____ Clinic/Unit: _____
- Are You a Veteran? Yes ☐ No ☐
- How would you describe your experience here today?
- Rating scales for:
 - 1. Courtesy of Staff
 - 2. Timeliness of Service
 - 3. Confidence in Provider
 - 4. Respect for Privacy
 - 5. Sensitivity to Concerns
 - 6. Cleanliness of Facility
 - 7. Health Information/Advice
- Great Good Fair Poor (with checkboxes)
- What have we done well? _____
- What could we do better? _____



Sheila and Charles Clements complete the Quik Card after an outpatient visit. Both are active volunteers at the Cincinnati VA.

Don't Accept Arthritis Pain, Defy It!

10 ways to combat inflammation

The word arthritis means “joint inflammation.” Sounds simple enough, yet hidden behind so generic a term are more than 100 different diseases.

Although the most common types of arthritis, osteoarthritis (OA), rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and gout, are distinct conditions, they all have one thing in common—pain. If arthritis is making it hard for you to tie your shoelaces, button a shirt or otherwise get through the day, try these tips:

1 See your VA healthcare provider promptly.

Left untreated, some forms of arthritis, including OA, RA and gout, can be crippling. Prompt diagnosis and proper treatment can prevent joint deformities, relieve pain and improve mobility. Call your provider if one or more of these symptoms persists for two weeks:

- joint stiffness lasting 30 minutes or longer
- constant or intermittent joint pain or tenderness
- difficulty moving a joint normally
- swelling, redness or warmth in one or more joints

2 Manage your disease. Work

with your provider to plan your treatment. Enroll in self-help classes and contact organizations that offer information, such as the National Arthritis Foundation (1-800-283-7800).

3 Bolster your emotional health.

Fear, anger and worry can heighten the percep-

tion of pain. And sometimes despair can be more debilitating than the arthritis itself. In contrast, friendship, hobbies and an upbeat, independent attitude can distract you from any discomfort. Relaxation techniques, hypnosis and counseling can lift your spirits. And you will benefit from doing as much as possible on your own rather than relying on others.

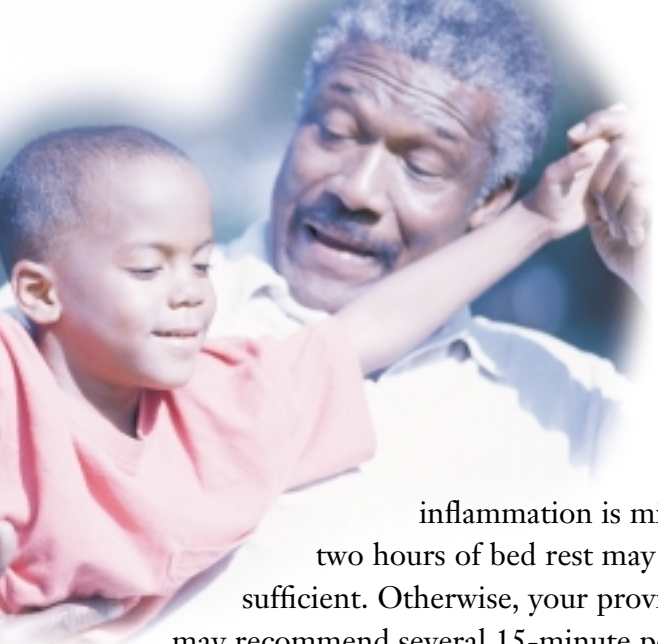
4 Balance rest with exercise. Physical activity can help you look, sleep and feel better. It also releases your body's natural painkillers and can reduce fatigue. Ask your provider to suggest exercises that will build muscles around joints and increase range of motion. Many people with arthritis find water exercises soothing.

Exercise must be balanced with joint rest. During flare-ups of gout, RA, systemic lupus erythematosus or psoriatic arthritis, 24-hour complete bed rest may be necessary. When



A Word About Supplements

Although dietary supplements are not a replacement for a poor diet, in some cases they can enhance a good diet to help maintain well-being. Recent evidence suggests that two such supplements, glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate, may boost cartilage health and reduce joint pain and stiffness. The combination of the two has not been shown to be any better than either alone. In addition, chondroitin is about 10 times as expensive as glucosamine. If you choose to use either product, found in drug-stores, supermarkets and health food stores, be aware that it may take six to eight weeks to notice an improvement. Always let your VA healthcare provider know of any supplements you may be taking.



inflammation is mild, two hours of bed rest may be sufficient. Otherwise, your provider may recommend several 15-minute periods of complete bed rest daily.

5 Use heat or cold treatments. Hot compresses, warm baths, heated pools, heating pads and paraffin baths may relax muscles and stimulate circulation. Cold packs, on the other hand, may numb hot, swollen joints during acute attacks. For optimal relief, follow these tips:

- Always place a towel between your skin and the heat or cold source.
- Always remove the heat or cold source after 20 minutes.
- Never apply heat or cold to sore or sensitive skin.
- Never combine analgesic rubs with heat; the combination can burn your skin.

6 Ask your VA healthcare provider about physical and occupational therapies.

Therapists trained in the appropriate use of exercises, massage, heat or cold treatments and TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) can provide pain relief and education.

7 Ask about special devices. Splints or other devices can stabilize or rest weak or damaged joints in some types of arthritis. Additionally, raised toilets, firm mattresses, straight-backed chairs, easy-to-grip silverware and many other devices can help you maintain your independence.

8 Talk to your VA healthcare provider about medications. Drug treatments vary depending on the underlying cause of arthritis. Acetaminophen can usually reduce the pain of

OA. For other types of arthritis, doctors commonly recommend nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen sodium and many others. NSAIDs effectively block pain and swelling but can also cause heartburn, stomach ulcers or bleeding. Analgesic rubs and creams can also bring relief. Like NSAIDs, some block pain. Others stimulate nerve endings to distract the brain from the main source of discomfort.

9 Consider nutrition. Diets rich in fish (especially mackerel, salmon and herring), canola oil, tofu and fruits and vegetables (especially green, leafy vegetables) may modestly lessen the inflammation



of RA. Consuming more fruits and vegetables may also help you lose or maintain a healthy weight—a change that will benefit your knees, hips and weight-bearing joints. Of course, a well-balanced diet that includes good sources of calcium and vitamin D is always good for your bones.

10 Ask if surgery is an option. If need be, surgeons can remove debris, realign bones or replace entire joints. Total hip and knee replacements often increase mobility and provide dramatic relief from OA. **VH**

Sniffing Out Quackery

From copper bracelets to snake venom to gelatin extracts, arthritis sufferers have long been the target of “miracle cures.” But quackery is easy to sniff out. Just look for these clues:

- claims that lotions or creams treat all types of arthritis
- promise of a cure
- claims based on personal testimonials rather than research
- research based on only one study, several small studies or studies that don't have control groups
- labels without directions or warnings of side effects



On You

Patient advocates work on
satisfaction with

Did you know VISN 10 has eight people waiting to make your care the best possible? These specially trained staff members are called patient advocates and it's their job to make you happy.

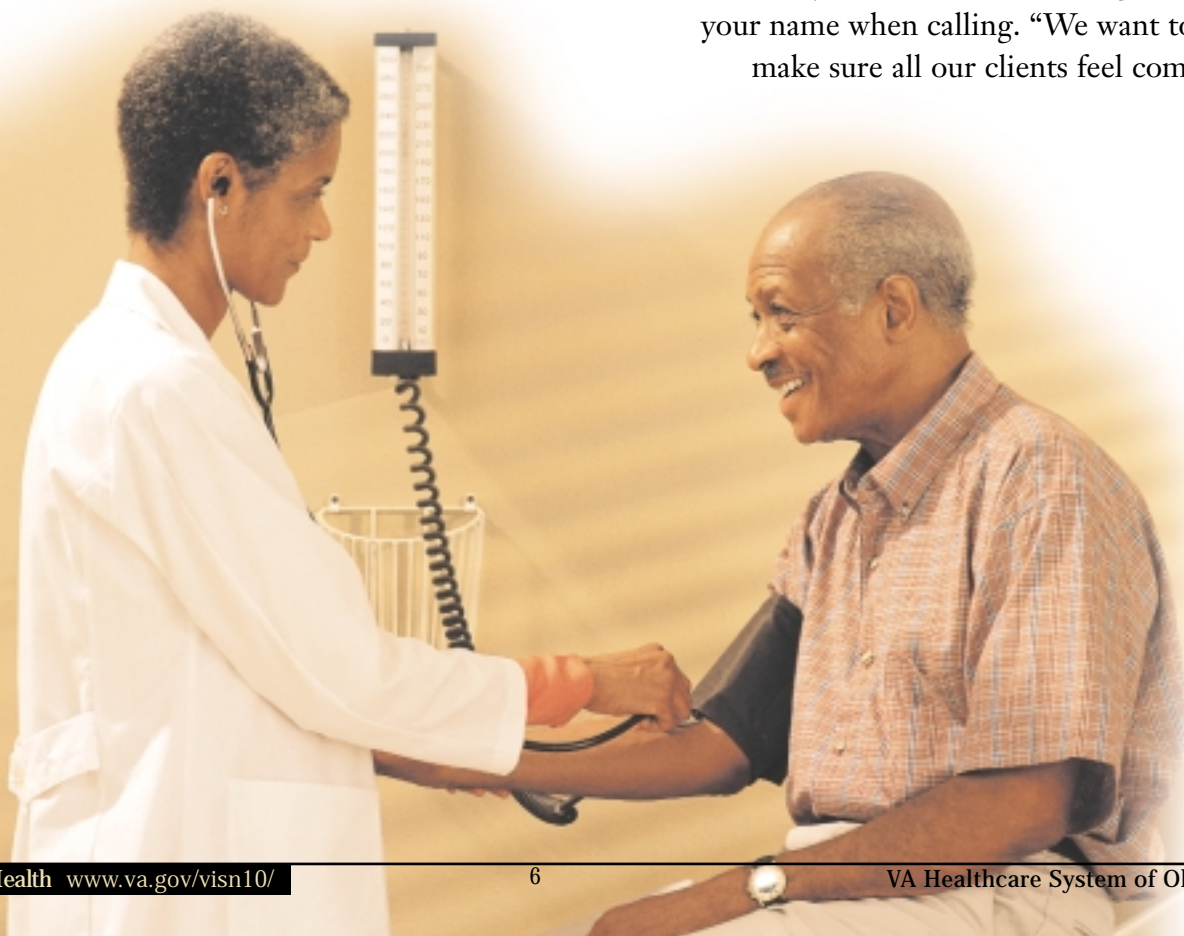
Taking advantage of patient advocates

Whether you have a scheduling complaint or a question about your family's health coverage, just call your regional patient advocate and he or she will make sure

your concern is handled as soon as possible. "We have an open-door policy," says patient advocate Brad Jones. Ninety percent of visits to the Chillicothe VA, where Brad works, are handled in fewer than two days.

To help resolve a problem quickly, write down as much as possible about your situation. If it's a billing question, make sure you have the most updated bill, date of care and the names of the people you've dealt with in the past.

Patient advocates are available to everyone in the VA system. If you're worried about privacy, keep in mind that you don't even have to give us your name when calling. "We want to make sure all our clients feel com-



r Side

your behalf to ensure all-around

VA healthcare services.

comfortable about being candid,” says Brad. “The privacy of all veterans and their families is respected at all times.”

What can a patient advocate handle?

“Everything a hospital does, we try to get our hands on,” says Brad. “From social work to insurance claims to scheduling conflicts, your patient advocate is there to listen to your needs. If we can’t put a problem out, we go to the source of the fire and remove the fuel.”

When they aren’t fixing problems or clearing up confusions, patient advocates are explaining directives and procedures. “Sometimes

patients don’t realize they are eligible for certain things,” says Brad. For example, some patients may receive a hearing aid, if it’s necessary for their care.

Patient advocates also routinely talk to patients to find out how situations are being handled, allowing them to fix problems before they happen. “Follow-ups are part of our jobs,” says Brad.

Why use a patient advocate?

“We are caring people who take pride in our jobs,” says Brad. “We want to make sure our

How To Reach Your Patient Advocate



Chillicothe

Brad Jones
Building 1, room 118
740-773-1141, ext. 6107

Cincinnati

Carole Webb
Room A103
513-475-6527

Dayton

Anna Burney
Room 1D-108E
937-268-6511 ext. 2164

Columbus

Betty Carr-Richards
Room 1008
614-257-5290

Cleveland

Harold Glenn
Brecksville division
Building 2, room 104
440-526-3030, ext. 6713

Audrey Revere
Brecksville division
Building 2, room D141
440-526-3030, ext. 6552

Keith Dixon
Wade Park division
1st floor, room C132
216-791-3800, ext. 4026

Geary Hughes
Wade Park division
1st floor, room 3304
216-791-3800, ext. 4019

clients get what they are entitled to. We want to make sure things are done fairly.”

Also, by bringing a problem to their attention, you’ll be saving other patients from going through similar situations.

Patient advocates know the ins-and-outs of the VA system. So if they don’t know the answer to your question, they can talk to someone who does. “We work to find the best resolution,” says Brad.

Turn to your patient advocate anytime

Don’t be shy about asking your patient advocate to help you figure out medication instructions or health claim forms. They are there to resolve everything from the parking situation to your healthcare provider’s availability—in short, to make sure you get the quality care you and your fellow veterans deserve. **VA**

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Akron VA Campus

676 South Broadway Street
Akron, OH 44311
330-344-4177

Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
216-526-3030

Canton VA Campus

221 3rd Street SE
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4660

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Columbus VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
606-572-6202

Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Hillsboro VA Campus

135 North High Street
Hillsboro, OH 45133
937-393-8176

Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Lima Campus

1220 E. Elm St.
Lima, OH 45804
419-227-9676

Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3834

Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0415

McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

New Philadelphia VA Campus

1260 Monroe Avenue
Suite 15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Otis Moss/University Hospital VA Campus

8819 Quincy Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-721-7221

Painesville VA Campus

W 7 Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Ravenna VA Campus

Medical Arts Boulevard
Suite 11A
6693 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Richmond/Hagerstown VA Campus

Nettle Creek Health Center
State Route 1
Hagerstown, IN 47346
765-489-3950

Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Warren VA Campus

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue (NW)
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at
1-888-838-6446.

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Visit us online at:
www.va.gov/visn10/

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